

Senate Chamber, Atlanta, Georgia
Wednesday, January 11, 2006
Third Legislative Day

The Senate met pursuant to adjournment at 10:00 a.m. today and was called to order by the President.

Senator Thomas of the 54th reported that the Journal of the previous legislative day had been read and found to be correct.

By unanimous consent, the reading of the Journal was dispensed with.

The Journal was confirmed.

The following Senate legislation was introduced, read the first time and referred to committee:

SB 398. By Senator Harp of the 29th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Code Section 17-7-131 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to proceedings upon a plea of insanity or mental incompetency at the time of a crime, so as to change certain provisions relating to the court's instructions; to revise procedures related to psychiatric evaluations of defendants; to provide for a timeframe for forwarding the examination report to the Department of Corrections; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Judiciary Committee.

SB 399. By Senators Shafer of the 48th, Zamarripa of the 36th, Moody of the 56th, Reed of the 35th and Hill of the 32nd:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Code Section 36-31-12 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to special services districts divided into noncontiguous areas, so as to provide that a noncontiguous area within three miles of another noncontiguous area may be treated as the same noncontiguous area; to provide for related matters; to provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the State and Local Governmental Operations (General) Committee.

- SB 400. By Senators Tolleson of the 20th, Hill of the 4th, Adelman of the 42nd, Kemp of the 46th, Bulloch of the 11th and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Part 5 of Article 1 of Chapter 8 of Title 40 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to equipment of law enforcement and emergency vehicles, so as to allow the use of properly equipped all-terrain vehicles by law enforcement agencies; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee.

- SB 401. By Senators Jones of the 10th, Brown of the 26th, Douglas of the 17th, Williams of the 19th, Adelman of the 42nd and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Chapter 5 of Title 43 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to athletic trainers, so as to provide for the licensure of personal trainers; to add a definition; to provide that the Georgia Board of Athletic Trainers shall establish guidelines for personal trainers; to provide that no person shall provide personal training without a license; to provide for qualifications for personal trainers; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee.

- SB 402. By Senators Jones of the 10th, Douglas of the 17th, Hill of the 4th, Adelman of the 42nd, Meyer von Bremen of the 12th and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Article 3 of Chapter 2 of Title 40 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to special license plates for certain persons and vehicles, so as to create a free distinctive license plate for recipients of the Bronze Star; to provide for related matters; to provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee.

- SB 403. By Senator Reed of the 35th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Code Section 48-8-3 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to exemptions from sales and use taxation, so as to provide for a limited period of time for a sales and use tax

exemption under certain circumstances of jet fuel sold to or used by certain qualifying airlines; to provide for early termination under certain circumstances; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Finance Committee.

SB 404. By Senators Seabaugh of the 28th, Balfour of the 9th and Johnson of the 1st:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Article 4 of Chapter 5 of Title 46 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to telecommunications and competition development, so as to create the Georgia Broadband Education Commission to educate the general public on the benefits of broadband technology and improving utilization of broadband technology within Georgia; to provide for the membership, appointment, terms, and duties of such commission; to provide that payments of any penalty or performance plans relating to local exchange companies be paid to the state and administered by the Georgia Broadband Education Commission; to promote parity among local exchange carriers; to provide for related matters; to provide a conditional effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee.

SR 675. By Senators Seabaugh of the 28th, Balfour of the 9th and Johnson of the 1st:

A RESOLUTION proposing an amendment to the Constitution so as to authorize the General Assembly to provide by general law for the creation of a Georgia Broadband Education Trust Fund from which funds shall be disbursed for the purposes of educating the general public on the benefits of broadband technology and improving utilization of broadband technology within Georgia; to provide for payments into the trust fund; to provide for the applicability of certain provisions of the Constitution; to provide for the submission of this amendment for ratification or rejection; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee.

The following committee report was read by the Secretary:

Mr. President:

The State and Local Governmental Operations Committee has had under consideration the following legislation and has instructed me to report the same back to the Senate with the following recommendation:

HB 780 Do Pass

Respectfully submitted,
Senator Wiles of the 37th District, Chairman

The following legislation was read the second time:

SB 386

Senator Meyer von Bremen of the 12th asked unanimous consent that Senator Thompson of the 33rd be excused. The consent was granted, and Senator Thompson was excused.

Senator Bulloch of the 11th asked unanimous consent that Senator Tolleson of the 20th be excused. The consent was granted, and Senator Tolleson was excused.

Senator Henson of the 41st asked unanimous consent that Senator Zamarripa of the 36th be excused. The consent was granted, and Senator Zamarripa was excused.

The roll was called and the following Senators answered to their names:

Adelman	Henson	Shafer,D
Balfour	Hill,Jack	Smith
Brown	Hill,Judson	Starr
Bulloch	Hooks	Staton
Butler	Hudgens	Stephens
Cagle	Johnson	Stoner
Carter	Jones	Tarver
Chance	Kemp	Tate
Chapman	Me V Bremen	Thomas,D
Douglas	Miles	Thomas,R
Goggans	Moody	Thompson,C
Golden	Mullis	Unterman
Grant	Pearson	Weber
Hamrick	Powell	Whitehead
Harbison	Rogers	Wiles
Harp	Seabaugh	Williams
Heath	Seay	

Not answering were Senators:

Fort	Reed	Schaefer
Thompson, S (Excused)	Tolleson (Excused)	Zamarripa (Excused)

The following members were off the floor of the Senate when the roll was called and wish to be recorded as present:

Senators:	Fort	Reed	Schaefer
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The members pledged allegiance to the flag.

Senator Seay of the 34th introduced the chaplain of the day, Reverend Edward Johnson of Fayetteville, Georgia, who offered scripture reading and prayer.

The following resolutions were read and adopted:

SR 662. By Senator Golden of the 8th:

A RESOLUTION commending Police Chief C. Frank Simons; and for other purposes.

SR 663. By Senator Staton of the 18th:

A RESOLUTION expressing regret at the passing of Carroll Campbell; and for other purposes.

SR 664. By Senators Staton of the 18th, Brown of the 26th, Douglas of the 17th and Chance of the 16th:

A RESOLUTION expressing regret at the passing of Sergeant Philip Allan Dodson, Jr.; and for other purposes.

SR 665. By Senators Staton of the 18th, Brown of the 26th, Douglas of the 17th and Chance of the 16th:

A RESOLUTION expressing regret at the passing of Specialist Marcus Shawn Futrell; and for other purposes.

SR 666. By Senators Staton of the 18th, Brown of the 26th, Hooks of the 14th and Harp of the 29th:

A RESOLUTION commending Dr. R. Kirby Godsey; and for other purposes.

- SR 667. By Senators Staton of the 18th, Brown of the 26th, Douglas of the 17th and Chance of the 16th:

A RESOLUTION expressing regret at the passing of Corporal William Grady Taylor; and for other purposes.

- SR 668. By Senators Smith of the 52nd, Kemp of the 46th, Stephens of the 27th, Heath of the 31st, Cagle of the 49th and others:

A RESOLUTION expressing regret at the passing of Gary Earl Tillman and Hannah Gail Tillman; and for other purposes.

- SR 669. By Senators Smith of the 52nd, Kemp of the 46th, Stephens of the 27th, Heath of the 31st, Cagle of the 49th and others:

A RESOLUTION expressing regret at the passing of Anna Kipp; and for other purposes.

- SR 670. By Senators Staton of the 18th, Douglas of the 17th, Chance of the 16th and Kemp of the 46th:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending the University of Georgia Bulldogs football team and Head Coach Mark Richt; and for other purposes.

- SR 671. By Senators Kemp of the 46th, Hudgens of the 47th, Whitehead, Sr. of the 24th, Seabaugh of the 28th and Harp of the 29th:

A RESOLUTION commending the University of Georgia men's golf team; and for other purposes.

- SR 672. By Senators Kemp of the 46th, Hudgens of the 47th, Whitehead, Sr. of the 24th, Seabaugh of the 28th and Harp of the 29th:

A RESOLUTION commending Coach Chris Haack; and for other purposes.

- SR 673. By Senators Kemp of the 46th, Mullis of the 53rd, Miles of the 43rd, Tolleson of the 20th, Carter of the 13th and others:

A RESOLUTION commending the firefighters of Georgia and observing the 34th annual Firefighters' Recognition Day; and for other purposes.

SR 674. By Senators Staton of the 18th and Chance of the 16th:

A RESOLUTION congratulating Mr. William Charles Roquemore on the occasion of his 100th birthday; and for other purposes.

Senator Williams of the 19th asked unanimous consent that the following bill be withdrawn from the Senate Natural Resources and the Environment Committee and committed to the Senate Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee:

SB 373. By Senators Douglas of the 17th, Grant of the 25th, Schaefer of the 50th, Staton of the 18th, Williams of the 19th and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Code Section 40-5-36 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to veterans' licenses, honorary licenses, and other distinctive licenses, so as to provide for an honorary license for the unmarried surviving spouse or child of certain deceased military persons; to provide for conditions; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

The consent was granted, and SB 373 was committed to the Senate Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee.

SENATE LOCAL CONSENT CALENDAR

Wednesday, January 11, 2006
Third Legislative Day

(The names listed are the Senators whose districts are affected by the legislation.)

HB 780 Williams of the 19th
TOOMBS COUNTY

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend an Act creating the Board of Commissioners of Toombs County, approved February 13, 1959 (Ga. L. 1959, p. 2010), as amended, particularly by an Act approved March 23, 1977 (Ga. L. 1977, p. 3927), so as to reconstitute the board of commissioners; to change the description of the commissioner districts; to provide for definitions and inclusions; to provide for continuation in office of current members; to provide for election and terms of office of subsequent members; to provide for submission of this Act for preclearance under the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended; to provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

The report of the committee, which was favorable to the passage of the local legislation as reported, was agreed to.

On the passage of the legislation, a roll call was taken, and the vote was as follows:

Y Adelman	Y Hill,Jack	Y Smith
Y Balfour	Y Hill,Judson	Y Starr
Y Brown	Y Hooks	Y Staton
Y Bulloch	Y Hudgens	Y Stephens
Y Butler	Y Johnson	Y Stoner
Y Cagle	Y Jones	Y Tarver
Y Carter	Y Kemp	Tate
Y Chance	Y Me V Bremen	Y Thomas,D
Y Chapman	Y Miles	Y Thomas,R
Y Douglas	Y Moody	Y Thompson,C
Y Fort	Y Mullis	E Thompson,S
Y Goggans	Y Pearson	E Tolleson
Y Golden	Powell	Y Unterman
Y Grant	Y Reed	Y Weber
Y Hamrick	Y Rogers	Y Whitehead
Y Harbison	Y Schaefer	Y Wiles
Y Harp	Y Seabaugh	Y Williams
Y Heath	Y Seay	Y Zamarripa
Y Henson	Y Shafer,D	

On the passage of the local legislation, the yeas were 52, nays 0.

The legislation on the Local Consent Calendar, having received the requisite constitutional majority, was passed.

Senator Wiles of the 37th moved that the Senate adopt the Conference Committee Report #2 on SB 203.

SB 203. By Senator Wiles of the 37th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Article 2 of Chapter 12 of Title 17 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to public defenders, so as to authorize the recovery of attorney's fees and costs from persons who receive indigent defense services; to provide for related matters; to provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Senator Wiles of the 37th asked unanimous consent that Senate Rule 2-8.3b be suspended in order to allow the consideration of SB 203.

Senator Thomas of the 2nd objected.

Senator Wiles of the 37th withdrew his motion that the Senate adopt the Conference Committee Report #2 on SB 203.

Senator Seay of the 34th introduced the doctor of the day, Dr. Spencer S. Brewer, Jr.

The President appointed as a Committee of Escort on the part of the Senate the following Senators: Schaefer of the 50th, Douglas of the 17th, Tolleson of the 20th, Harbison of the 15th, Cagle of the 49th, Stephens of the 27th and Kemp of the 46th.

Senator Williams of the 19th moved that the Senate stand in recess until the Joint Session; then, upon the dissolution of the Joint Session, stand in recess until 5:00 p.m. to enable HB 970 to be read for the first time and assigned to the Senate Finance Committee. The Senate would then stand adjourned until 10:00 a.m., Thursday, January 12, 2006.

The President announced the motion prevailed at 10:48 a.m.

The hour for convening the Joint Session of the Senate and House having arrived, the President, accompanied by the Secretary and Senators, proceeded to the Hall of the House of Representatives, and the Joint Session, called for the purpose of hearing a message by His Excellency, Governor Sonny Perdue, was called to order by the Speaker of the House. HR 1043 authorizing the Joint Session of the Senate and House was read by the Clerk of the House.

His Excellency, Governor Sonny Perdue, addressed the Joint Session of the Senate and the House of Representatives as follows:

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Senator Johnson, Representative Burkhalter ... Members of the General Assembly. Constitutional officers and members of the judiciary. The Consular Corps and other distinguished guests. And, most of all, my fellow Georgians:

Today marks the fourth time you've allowed me to come before you to report on the state of our great State of Georgia.

In my first address I spoke of dark clouds and a troubled economy battered by recession. The seas were stormy, but we were determined to find our way to a New Georgia – safe, healthy, educated and growing.

Last year, I reported an economic recovery was underway. Georgians were going back to work. The clouds were parting.

Today I'm happy to say that our progress has continued over the last twelve months. Our job growth has surged. Our communities and our state grow stronger each day.

We're putting the dark clouds behind us. And we have many more sunny days ahead.

With our economy growing again, we should give credit where credit is due.

Georgia's economic comeback is, above all, a tribute to our strengths as a state and to the optimism and enterprise of our citizens.

I'm proud of the millions of Georgians who have done the hard work of leading our recovery –

The small business owners who grow companies that create good jobs for Georgia families.

The investors and entrepreneurs who take the risks of bringing new ideas to market.

The Georgia workers who are more productive and better prepared to compete in the global economy.

I'm proud too of the thousands of new Georgians who move to our state each year from across the country and around the world. Georgia today is the 9th largest state and one of the fastest growing in the nation. At last count, there are over 9 million Georgians.

People keep coming to our state because Georgia is a great place to live, to get an education, to work and to raise a family.

Georgia is a state of opportunity. Our job is to make sure it remains so. And the best way for those of us in public office to do that is to remember that government doesn't create jobs, growth and prosperity – our people do.

Government's role is to create fertile opportunities for Georgians to succeed and prosper. Today I want to share with you my 2006 legislative agenda and budget priorities, which do exactly that.

My agenda for Georgia is based on what Georgians themselves have told me are their priorities – education ... children ... jobs ... safe communities. And a state government that lives within its means and that respects individual liberty.

This should be a familiar list, because these have been my priorities from my first day in office. This year, thanks to our growing economy, we have additional resources to invest in our priorities. I am projecting one and quarter billion dollars in new revenues for 2007.

That strong revenue gain gives us all a sense of relief. But our improving revenues are no cause for complacency.

A growing population is good, but more Georgians means more kids in our schools, more drivers on our roads, more patients in health care system. These are the unavoidable obligations that come with growth, just like the arrival of a new baby at home. Meeting those obligations will consume much of our new revenue.

But not all of it. What makes this year's budget different is what we've done together over the last three years to make our state government more efficient and effective.

The \$640 million deficit we inherited three years ago made changing state government's culture of spending not just a good idea, but also a necessity.

We asked each state agency to identify its core mission and to prioritize its budget requests. We took a hard look at every program and cut those we could do without.

I established the Commission for a New Georgia and asked some of our state's top business leaders to recommend ways we could improve the operations of state government. Implementing their recommendations has already saved the taxpayers millions of dollars. And those savings will multiply over the years.

In total, thanks to our sound fiscal management and conservative budgeting, we reduced the size of state government by over \$1 billion per year, while also creating a surplus and rebuilding our rainy day fund.

Because we made the tough decisions then, we are now able to make some of the important investments we had to defer when times were lean, just as we must do in our family budgets.

And we will begin with our top priority – education.

My education budget has a strong classroom focus because the classroom is where learning happens. It is only common sense that we should spend our education dollars where they can do the most good and have the biggest direct impact on student achievement.

That is exactly why I've asked you to establish a standard for local school districts to spend at least 65% of their budgets in the classroom.

I believe that, next to having parents involved in their children's education, the single best thing we can do for our students is to keep dedicated and experienced teachers in our classrooms.

Of course, we all know that a teacher's workday begins long before the first class starts and continues long after the last bell sends the students home.

As the son of a teacher, I also know this from personal experience. My mother taught English, but she taught her students much more than the fundamentals of reading, writing and grammar. She taught them lessons of character and responsibility and helped them gain the confidence and skills they needed to succeed.

Each of us recalls those teachers who inspired us and challenged us to excel. Those of us who are parents know the importance of good teachers in our own children's lives. And everyone recognizes the critical role teachers play in preparing the next generation to assume their roles in society.

That is why all of us appreciate the demanding and important work that Georgia's teachers do. And that is why I want to give all of our teachers a well-deserved 4% pay raise.

More than half of teachers will receive a 7% raise. Just as importantly,,, my budget also provides teachers health insurance with... NO increase in premiums.

And let me tell you one more thing. As long as the people of Georgia trust me to be their Governor, our Georgia teachers will remain the highest paid teachers in the Southeast.

Today, I want to share with you, and our teachers, some additional good news. As we all know, many of our teachers dig into their own pockets each school year to purchase classroom materials and supplies.

Teachers buy extra pencils and notebooks for their students ... decorations for the bulletin board ... materials for a class project ... the list is just about endless. But the important point is that teachers are spending their own money to help our children learn.

That dedication deserves recognition. It also deserves a little bit of extra help from us. That's why I've included \$10 million in my budget to provide every Georgia teacher with one of these ... the Classroom Gift Card.

The Classroom Gift Card works just like the store gift cards that many of us found in our stockings at Christmas. Each Classroom Gift Card will be worth 100 dollars that teachers can use to purchase school supplies during Georgia's Back To School sales tax holiday this fall. It's just one more tool we can provide our teachers to help them do their important job.

Of course, showing respect for teachers means not just rewarding their hard work, but understanding that they are the ones on the front lines and who deserve a listening ear for

their ideas. As I announced yesterday, this year we will meet another top request from teachers by reducing class sizes in grades K-8 through my Truth in Class Size legislation.

My budget includes \$163 million for class size reductions. My budget also includes \$447 million in bonds for classroom construction, for new equipment and for buying 1000 new school buses. That means new buses for every county in the state.

A strong classroom focus will help every district and every school improve. But there is another critical ingredient for raising student achievement – and that's leadership.

Every team needs a great leader to set a great example. In our schools, that's the principal's job. And in those schools that most need improvement, solid leadership from the principal's office is essential.

With many of our most experienced principals approaching retirement, we must now recruit and train the next generation of educational leaders. My budget includes \$3 million to recruit High Performance Principals to lead our Needs Improvement middle and high schools.

High Performance Principals have a proven record of raising student achievement results in the schools they lead. These are the leaders we want in our most challenged schools.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, sadly, nearly 40% of our students drop out of high school before earning their diplomas. In a state with as much promise as Georgia, that's an unacceptable waste of talent. It's high time for Georgia to make sure more of its students graduate from high school.

In the competitive global economy, dropouts will pay a steep price for their incomplete education. The jobs with a future are knowledge jobs. And you've got to have the knowledge before you get the job.

Our employers also pay the price of high dropout rates when they can't find enough skilled workers. That is why my budget targets \$23.3 million to raise Georgia's graduation rates. This will put a completion counselor in every single high school in Georgia, with the sole purpose of working individually with students to encourage them to complete their education.

Overall, my budget devotes over 72% of our new revenues to education. They say the best time to plant an oak tree is 100 years ago. But the second best time to plant an oak tree is today. My friends, with this budget we are planting a forest of oaks for Georgia's children and their future.

Getting a good education and finding that first job are doors of opportunity that should be open wide for every young Georgian.

Before I discuss our broader plans to spur job creation in Georgia, I want to highlight one initiative that is introducing a special group of young Georgians to the workplace.

The TeenWork initiative offers summer employment opportunities to teens in foster care. Last summer over 400 foster teens were employed by state agencies and private companies. Before starting work, each teen received training in basic job skills such as how to apply for a job, proper business attire and good time management.

Foster kids often lack the mentors and role models to teach them workplace fundamentals. The TeenWork program has given these foster teens a successful start in their working careers. But that doesn't surprise me.

I'm proud to tell you that the TeenWork Initiative was created by the First Lady's Children's Cabinet, chaired by the best champion Georgia's children have ever known -- my lifelong partner and the love of my life, Mary Perdue.

Through the Our Children Campaign, Mary has encouraged thousands of Georgians to get involved in meeting the needs of abused and neglected children within their communities. She has organized three statewide Summits on our Children to raise public awareness of children's issues.

Last year, Mary and the Children's Cabinet helped launch the Foster Family Foundation of Georgia. The Foundation is an independent, non-profit organization that will recruit, train, and support both foster and adoptive families.

That's only a fraction of Mary's many efforts to improve the lives of Georgia's children. I'm not bragging when I say I work hard as your Governor. But I want you to know that your First Lady works just as hard for this cause so close to her heart.

And, Mary, I want you to know how proud I am of you and the example you set of caring for all of Georgia's children.

In a very real sense, everything we do to strengthen and improve our state is for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

I know that being a proud father and grandfather strengthens my determination that the next generation of Georgians will inherit from us a state where they can aspire to a better education, a better job and a better life. And a state with its priorities clear ... and its books in order.

Yes, we want these things for ourselves. But, above all, don't we want to leave our children a better world?

Yet, for many parents, improving life for their children isn't just about hopes and dreams for the future ... it's also a question of economic survival in the here and now.

For today's families, child care is a critical need. That is why I am proposing we enact a Georgia Child Care Tax Credit in addition to the existing federal tax credit.

The new Georgia Child Care Tax Credit will return \$50 million to working parents by 2008, to help with child care expenses.

Helping parents and families afford child care is the kind of practical step that government should take to help create the conditions for prosperity.

Government should be about the business of empowering Georgians to learn more, earn more and save more.

Government should also make the wise long-term investments that will help our economy keep growing and keep creating jobs for decades to come.

You see, in the 21st century global economy we have only two options. Georgia can lead or Georgia can be left behind.

I want to guarantee you this – as long as I'm your Governor, Georgia is going to lead.

To lead, we must innovate. That means, we must become a State of Innovation.

That means making innovation our competitive advantage in every area of our economy – in our existing industries, in our homegrown small businesses and in the growth industries of the future, such as life sciences and nano-manufacturing.

These are the industries that will cure cancer ... improve our food safety and supply ... and provide new sources of energy to power our lives and propel our state's economy forward.

Building an innovation economy requires three main ingredients: people, capital and infrastructure.

Georgia is investing in all three areas. We're investing \$80 million this year alone.

Our Eminent Scholar program already brings world-class researchers to Georgia – the scientists and inventors whose research changes lives and becomes the basis for new companies and new industries.

Bringing university research from the lab to the market has helped us create successful companies in Georgia like Mindspring, now Earthlink ... and medical science leaders like Inhibitex and Theragenics.

At our Centers of Innovation, we are bringing our best university research together with top Georgia companies to make new advances in logistics, data processing, aeronautics, agriculture. New advances that will help Georgia companies become more competitive, grow more rapidly and create more jobs.

In the area of investment capital, we will budget \$5 million to expand our Seed Capital Fund for early stage bioscience entrepreneurs. And \$5 million for the Life Sciences Facilities Fund to help provide growing bioscience firms with the facilities they need to continue their growth here in Georgia.

To strengthen our investment infrastructure, I am recommending investments in nanotechnology, energy and broadband technology.

My budget includes \$38 million in bonds to complete the construction of a Nanotechnology Research Center at Georgia Tech to establish Georgia as a global leader in this emerging industry.

To ensure Georgia's energy future, I am budgeting \$2 million to seed research on developing alternative fuels, such as expanding our BioRefinery program at the University of Georgia.

Bio-fuels convert materials like wood chips, peanut hulls and other organic matter into viable energy sources. As a strong agricultural state, Georgia should be, and will be, a leader in this field. We'll be able to meet more of our own energy needs, reduce our dependence on foreign oil ... and turn a profit.

The third area of investment is broadband. I call broadband the new dial tone. Today, we could not imagine any business, much less an entire community, operating without access to reliable telephone service. Today, broadband internet access is just as important for our 21st Century communications infrastructure.

The goal of my Broadband Initiative is to ensure that every Georgia community is plugged in to the global economy with the broadband connectivity that individuals and businesses need.

I will ask the OneGeorgia Authority to establish a \$5 million grant program to support rural broadband access. In addition, I am also proposing a \$5 million initiative at the Georgia Technology Authority to partner with at least three Georgia cities to bring wireless broadband – WiFi – to their areas.

With these, and the many other investments included in my budget, we will continue Georgia's transformation into a State of Innovation that will provide a growing economy, good jobs and thriving communities for our citizens.

As we build an educated and growing Georgia, we must also act to create a safer Georgia. We must get dangerous sexual predators off our streets and away from our children.

I know that with the General Assembly's help, Georgia will have the toughest sexual predator law in the nation by the end of this session.

And to ensure that we have enough prison space to keep dangerous criminals locked up, I am recommending \$45 million to add more than 4,300 beds to the State's prison system and reduce the jail backlog burden on our counties.

Unfortunately, we are all too aware of a growing plague in our state – methamphetamine. Meth destroys lives, attacks families, and undermines communities. Georgia has been a leader in battling the meth scourge. But we need to do more.

My budget includes \$1 million to create a GBI "MethForce" to target and investigate meth-related crimes statewide.

I have also invited U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales to come to Georgia and discuss stronger state and federal coordination of anti-meth efforts. He has accepted and will be here next month.

We will not allow the scourge of meth abuse to run unchecked in our state. Georgia will fight back ... and Georgia will win.

That's just the nature of our people. Show us a problem and we will find a solution.

That problem-solving, "get it done" attitude that comes so naturally to Georgians is exactly what they expect from their state government.

Another thing they expect and deserve is efficient, customer-friendly service.

One example of the emphasis we are placing on customer service was the excellent work of Joe Doyle and the Task Force he led to identify specific ways we can and will ensure that government services are easier to access, faster to complete and delivered by friendly people, with a smile.

Let me share just one success story with you. It is a story still in progress, because we've still got work to do. But I am proud of their results so far.

Last year at this podium I said that if government didn't have a monopoly on the business of issuing drivers licenses, we'd be out of that business. I think that accurately summed up the frustration many Georgians felt over the long lines and headaches at the DMV.

So we created a new Department of Driver Services with one core mission -- getting Georgia drivers their licenses quickly, efficiently, and courteously.

Commissioner Greg Dozier and the nearly 750 Driver Services employees have taken their mission to heart and taken the licensing process to a whole new level.

We are hiring more license examiners, opening new service centers, enabling online change of address, and otherwise making the license renewal process more pleasant and convenient for busy Georgia drivers.

How much progress have we made? Well, radio listeners know that Neal Boortz is not exactly low maintenance when it comes to government services. But even Neal took time on the air to compliment his most recent license renewing experience.

So to Greg and all his team at the Department of Driver Services – thank you, and keep up the good work.

Just as Georgians expect our government to provide excellent service, we also expect, and rightfully so, that government will respect our individual rights and liberties, including our property rights.

Last summer the Supreme Court of the United States took a hammer to property rights with their eminent domain decision. The Court ruled that government can use its awesome power to condemn your property and give it to another private owner, for private profit.

I say now what I said then – the Court got it wrong. That's not the America I grew up in ... and that's not the America I want to live in. Private property is one of the bedrock foundations of our freedom. And I stand with Georgians in saying -- we will do whatever it takes to protect our personal property rights.

But government has another awesome power – the power to tax. Whenever government takes more than it needs of your money we have a responsibility to give it back. And that is exactly what my budget does.

When rising gas prices brought a revenue windfall to government last fall, we returned \$77 million to taxpayers by suspending the sales tax on gasoline.

When skyrocketing natural gas prices produced another windfall to the state and made it more expensive for Georgians to heat their homes this winter, I asked the General Assembly to ratify my Executive Order cutting the sales tax on natural gas for home heating in half, giving up to \$20 million back to Georgians.

On behalf of the people of Georgia, I want to thank you for your speedy action today on this important item.

There is another giving back story I want to share with you. We're giving back to Georgia seniors. They've worked hard and paid taxes all their lives. As we move toward my goal of eliminating the income tax for seniors, this year we will begin giving seniors \$285 million in tax savings.

Additionally, we've provided \$60 million in tax relief for small business.

We reformed our corporate tax system to provide greater incentives for companies to locate and grow in Georgia.

My proposed Land Conservation Tax Credit provides tax savings of up to a quarter of a million dollars for land donated by individuals, and half a million for corporate donations.

Along with the \$5 million in my budget for local land conservation grants, this credit will help us reach Georgia's conservation goals.

Our annual sales tax holidays have helped Georgia parents pay for back to school clothing and supplies with over \$10 million in savings.

We acknowledged the sacrifices of our National Guard by exempting the military income of Guard members on active duty from income tax – a well-earned savings to military families of \$4.5 million.

And we've delivered hundreds of millions of dollars in property tax relief to Georgia home owners. My budget this year fully funds the homestead tax exemption at \$434 million.

Collectively, including my new proposals, we will have provided Georgians with more than two billion dollars in tax relief since I took office.

Spending only what we need and no more. Constantly seeking new efficiencies.

Aggressively returning money to the taxpayers.

That's what it means for government to "live within its means." That's what it means for those of us entrusted with the management of government to meet our obligations of stewardship.

The people of Georgia are the owners of our state, the ultimate shareholders to whom we are all accountable.

As a growing economy brings a brighter revenue picture, we will not lose sight of these cornerstone truths.

We will continue to ask the tough questions and scrutinize every program and every line item. We will continue investing in Georgia families and their kitchen table issues, like education, jobs, and safe communities.

But one thing we won't do is go back to the bad spending habits of the past. As I said here last year, we've already burned the ships that could take us back. We're committed now to going forward, to building a New Georgia on the foundations of openness, accountability and stewardship.

In recent months, I have traveled to nearly every corner of our state. I've met with hundreds of Georgians. Farmers and students, small business owners and factory workers, young parents and retirees.

They share with me their stories of success ... their plans ... their dreams ... and their optimism about Georgia's future.

I feel very strongly about my responsibility to all of our citizens, as I know every member of this Legislature does.

But I must admit that there is one group of Georgians toward whom I feel an extra measure of responsibility – our men and women in the Armed Forces serving overseas.

Especially on my mind are the troops of the Georgia National Guard's 48th Brigade, currently on active duty in Iraq.

I had the privilege of spending the Thanksgiving holiday with our troops in the Middle East.

I was humbled to travel to Iraq, and Afghanistan to express the gratitude, pride, and support that Georgians feel for these men and women -- our neighbors and family members -- who are giving so much to defend our freedom.

I let our troops know that Georgians are keeping our promise to care for their families while they are away. Many Georgia companies and individuals have given to the Georgia National Guard Foundation, which I encourage you all to support.

Tens of thousands of Georgians are lending their support in countless other ways, including through their prayers.

As I visited with our soldiers, I asked if there was anything I could do for them.

They wanted Georgians to know that they understand their mission to help a true democracy take root in Iraq and they are committed to finishing the job.

Some wanted me to bring personal messages to their loved ones, which I did.

Others asked, "Governor, I want to know if there will be a job waiting for me at home when we finish the job here."

Last May, I proudly stood with our troops at Fort Stewart to salute them and wish them Godspeed as the 48th deployed to Iraq. But what I'm looking forward to this year is standing with our troops when Georgia welcomes them home.

This is the year the 48th comes home. And the least we can do as we welcome them back is ensure that every returning service member finds a job waiting for them in Georgia. As their Governor and commander-in-chief I have made a solemn pledge to our Guard members that this will be true.

Will you help me keep that promise?

Our citizen soldiers are performing heroic, world-changing work. Not only by fighting bravely, but through the small, day-to-day human victories. In this war against an inhumane creed of terrorism, our innate compassion and humanity are the most effective -- and gentlest -- weapon.

Thanks to Georgians, a better world is already coming into view for one young Iraqi -- baby Noor.

It was members of Georgia's 48th Brigade who helped give new life to 3-month-old Noor, an Iraqi newborn with a severe spinal cord defect that was untreatable in Iraq.

Our citizen-soldiers arranged to fly baby Noor and her grandmother to Atlanta, where doctors at Children's Health Care are have performed the life-saving surgery she needs at no charge.

Baby Noor is still here in Atlanta, undergoing treatment. But when she returns to her parents in Iraq, she will bear a new name, a name that carries with it the promise of hope.

Her family has decided to call this precious little girl ... Georgia.

One of the soldiers of the 48th whom I met during my visit was Private Shane Parham of Social Circle. Private Parham served as a gunner on a Humvee. He was injured in the line of duty when his Humvee rolled over and is now back home in Georgia.

Shane has been recommended to receive the Bronze Star.

When he is not wearing our country's uniform, Shane serves the people of Georgia in the uniform of a Walton County deputy sheriff.

As a father of three young daughters, Shane Parham's love of children has given him a special insight into the significance of the work he and his comrades in the 48th are doing.

When he got back from Iraq, he had this to say: "If we can get these Iraqi children to like us, our children will not have to fight theirs."

That may be the wisest comment I have heard on the conflict in Iraq. Differences of religion, politics and culture aside, Iraqis love their children too, just like we do in Georgia.

And just like Georgians, Iraqi parents want a better life for their children. That was something they could never hope for. Now, thanks to a young Georgia father named Shane Parham ... and his thousands of fellow service members in the 48th Brigade and across the Armed Forces ... Iraqis have hope.

We are proud to have Private Shane Parham and his wife Wendy with us in the gallery today, along with Georgia's Adjutant General David Poythress.

Please join me in thanking General Poythress, Private Parham and all of our troops who are defending our freedom here and overseas.

Don't let anyone tell you our troops aren't making a difference. Everything we hope to build in Georgia and every dream we hope to attain for our state is made possible by the shield and protection that they provide.

They make possible the progress I expect to report when I return here next year. And they help ensure that for Georgia, as for all of America, our best days are always ahead of us.

God bless America and God bless Georgia.

Senator Williams of the 19th moved that the Joint Session be hereby dissolved.

The motion prevailed, and the Speaker of the House announced the Joint Session dissolved.

The following message was received from the House through Mr. Rivers, the Clerk thereof:

Mr. President:

The House has passed by the requisite constitutional majority the following Bill of the House:

HB 970. By Representatives Roberts of the 154th, Burkhalter of the 50th, O'Neal of the 146th, Golick of the 34th and Smith of the 129th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Title 48 of the O.C.G.A., relating to revenue and taxation, so as to provide for a partial exemption for a limited period of time with respect to state sales and use taxes applicable to the liquid propane gas commodity sold and delivered primarily for residential heating purposes and to charges for the natural gas commodity billed for residential use; to provide for legislative findings and intent; to provide for procedures, conditions, and limitations; to provide for powers, duties, and authority of the administrator of Part 2 of Article 15 of Chapter 10 of Title 10 of the O.C.G.A., the "Fair Business Practices Act," as amended; to provide for powers, duties, and authority of the state revenue commissioner with respect to the foregoing; to ratify an executive order of the Governor suspending the collection of such taxes; to provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

The following House legislation was read the first time and referred to committee:

HB 970. By Representatives Roberts of the 154th, Burkhalter of the 50th, O'Neal of the 146th, Golick of the 34th and Smith of the 129th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Title 48 of the O.C.G.A., relating to revenue and taxation, so as to provide for a partial exemption for a limited period of time with respect to state sales and use taxes applicable to the liquid propane gas commodity sold and delivered primarily for residential heating purposes and to charges for the natural gas commodity billed for residential use; to provide for legislative findings and intent; to provide for procedures,

conditions, and limitations; to provide for powers, duties, and authority of the administrator of Part 2 of Article 15 of Chapter 10 of Title 10 of the O.C.G.A., the "Fair Business Practices Act," as amended; to provide for powers, duties, and authority of the state revenue commissioner with respect to the foregoing; to ratify an executive order of the Governor suspending the collection of such taxes; to provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Finance Committee.

Pursuant to the provisions of a previously adopted motion, the Senate stood adjourned until 10:00 a.m. Thursday, January 12, 2006.